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AN E-COLLABORATION TUTORIAL FOR SHARING DIGITAL WORK WITH GEOGRAPHICALLY DISPERSED COLLABORATORS

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ABSTRACT

Recent statistics show that the number of online courses and degree programs have significantly grown over the last decade. In addition, online collaboration and teamwork in organizations has increased. As a result, numerous conferencing and collaboration tools have been developed to facilitate these activities. In this hands-on tutorial we will demonstrate the use and applications of Marratech desktop videoconferencing, Blackboard course Management System, and Elluminate Live with an emphasis of connecting dispersed collaborators. Time permitting, we will also cover innovative applications of Google Documents and Yahoo! Groups file repository features and the use of podcasting.

KEYWORDS

e-Collaboration, Virtual Teams, Collaboration, Geographically Dispersed Collaborators, Videoconferencing, Podcasting

BACKGROUND

Many times academic faculty are asked to be members of teams and groups comprised of other participants who are not located in the same geographic location. Although major conferences (e.g., ICIS, AMCIS, ACM SIGs, etc.) can serve as “rallying points” or hubs that enables real-time, face-to-face communication so vital to the continuation of activities for teams whose members are geographically dispersed, this communication practice is not adequate to meet the continuous working processes of most teams. Further, with nationwide reductions in university budgets, some academic faculty are unable to attend the larger conferences on an annual basis. E-mail provides the flexibility of asynchronous

communication, but can sometimes lead to member confusion with the volume of material that needs to be communicated and the number of people having to communicate via this asynchronous method.

Additionally, the growth in e-learning requires faculty familiarity with conferencing tools and technologies. For some learners, learning emerges through interaction with the course facilitator and through interaction and teamwork with their peers. The e-collaboration systems facilitate these interactions and teamwork.

Finally, advances in communication and computing technologies have resulted in a number of commercially-available (and sometimes low-cost or free) solutions to many of these communication challenges of geographically dispersed collaborators. The question for faculty members becomes one of what tool(s) can be used to support collaboration and online instruction needs when collaboration partners are geographically dispersed.

This tutorial will present several available software options that meet expressed needs of many geographically dispersed collaborators.

E-COLLABORATION TUTORIAL (length 1.5 hours)

We present an experiential, hands-on tutorial session that will permit session participants an opportunity to learn about software products that support the file sharing and synchronous and asynchronous communication activities of collaboration with dispersed collaboration partners. We anticipate being able to explore the major features of the following products:

Software Tools	Collaboration Features		
	Supported Communication Methods	Sharable Document Types	Synchronous vs. Asynchronous
Marratech desktop videoconferencing	Video, Audio, Text-based chat; group memory (whiteboard)	Powerpoint, Word (Mac: PDF)	Synchronous & asynchronous (recorded)
Elluminate Live!	Video, Audio, Text-based chat	Any file	Synchronous & asynchronous (recorded)
Yahoo! Groups	Email-file-image repository, group polling, calendar, simple database	Any – file repository	Asynchronous
Google Documents	Document sharing	Word, Excel	Asynchronous
WebCT/Blackboard	Text	HTML & text easily shared; stores any other types for download from browser	Asynchronous, but does support synchronous chat
Podcasting	Video, Audio	PPT, Word, Excel	Asynchronous
Wikis	Text		Asynchronous

Table 1. e-Collaboration Tutorial Products

For remote visual communication & team collaboration on documents:

- Marratech desktop videoconferencing
- Elluminate Live!

For file repository & sharing:

- Yahoo! Groups
- Google Documents

For e-learning applications

- WebCT/Blackboard
- Elluminate Live
- podcasting

The tutorial will be highly interactive. Participants will have the opportunity to complete guided exploration exercises in several of the collaboration tools. We will discuss successful applications of each of the collaboration tools to different collaboration situations.

At the end of this tutorial, participants will be able to:

- Understand the feature composition of different collaboration tool products
- Understand how these features can be used to support collaboration activities with dispersed collaborators
- Develop a written, one-session lesson-plan/agenda that incorporates the use of one or two of the collaboration tools in support of dispersed collaborators

TUTORIAL LEADERS

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(will be remote participant to demonstrate remote collaboration)